

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
First Sunday of Advent
Sunday, November 30, 2025**

**“The Night Is Far Gone”
Romans 13:11-14**

The Rev. Dr. David Clark

This morning, and rather unexpectedly, your minister is going to talk to you about fashion. Specifically, I’m going to talk about the need to wear fashion that’s very current – or should I say, that’s very *au courant*. In fact, I’m going to tell you that it’s not enough to be wearing this season’s fashions; no, you need to already be wearing *next* season’s fashions.

Now I do realize that it’s a little unusual to receive fashion advice from me, mostly because up-to-the-minute fashion isn’t exactly my forte. I mean, I don’t really keep up with the latest fashion trends. Case in point, right now I’m wearing an outfit that went out of style in the 70s—the 1970s. But just wait, you’ll see, as St. Paul explains in our Epistle Lesson from Romans, getting dressed for next season’s fashions is in fact key to the Christian life.

In our Lesson, St. Paul starts out by talking about the time. He says, “You know what time it is” (v. 11). And when St. Paul talks about the “time,” this isn’t about the hours of the day; he doesn’t just mean lunchtime or bedtime. For Paul, “time” has less to do with “when,” and a lot to do with “who”; for Paul, the time—and the nearness of time—is about the coming nearness of Christ. “You know what time it is,” he says, “how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is near” (vv. 11-12). Paul speaks of the “time” to make us more attentive to the coming of Christ, to alert us to the nearness of Christ. And there’s no better time to hear this message than on the First Sunday of Advent.

The word ‘advent’ comes from a Latin word (‘adventus,’ if you’re wondering) which means ‘coming,’ ‘approach,’ ‘arrival’ (Lewis & Short). And the church celebrates two advents, two approaches or arrivals of Christ. One is in the past, the other in the future; one in a humble manger, the other in glorious splendour. In the first Advent, at Christmas, God entered into this broken world, revealing the depths of divine love in Christ. In the second Advent, to which we look forward with hope, God promises to return in Christ to restore this broken world. Advent is not merely preparation for Christmas; not at all! Advent is about the expectation of Christ’s coming as Christ first came to us at Christmas—and in that future promise, reflecting a past nearness, Advent invites us into a hopeful expectation.

On this First Sunday of Advent, as we begin this season of waiting and hoping, St. Paul doesn’t only tell us the time—but also tells us what the time means for us, for our actions, our commitments, our lives. And for Paul, the time means that we’ve got to change our clothes, and put on the newest fashions. The problem is that we’re wearing last season’s styles, for the night that’s passing away—but, Paul says, it’s time to get dressed for the dawning day.

“[T]he night is far gone,” Paul tells us, “the day is near.” So what does that mean? Paul says: “Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the

day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 12-14).

Knowing the time, we've got to put on the right clothes and don the fashions that are very *now*. Ugh, debauchery and licentiousness are so 2024; this season, look for bold prints, colourful accessories, and Christlike love. It's time to toss away those old threads—of sin and bitterness and anger—and instead to put on "the armour of light," and indeed to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

And for Paul, the point is to get dressed *now* for *next* season. The coming of Christ is not yet here; "salvation is nearer," Paul says—but not yet. So this isn't about dressing for the current season, but about dressing for what's next: getting dressed for the day that is coming. This is about getting so caught up in God's purposes now that we'll be shaped today by what's yet to be—that we'll conform pre-emptively to the world to come. Knowing the time, we're called to get dressed in advance for the coming celebration of Christ.

When I was a teenager, I lived in Argentina. My high school there had an annual formal dance at a fancy hotel in downtown Buenos Aires. But once, there was a bit of a scheduling problem: I played on the basketball team (I know; big shock), and one year the dance was scheduled very soon after a basketball game. Now Buenos Aires is an enormous city—and the basketball game was a long way from the hotel. So for all of us on the basketball team, it was very tight to make it to the dance on time. There was really only one way to pull it off: we had to get dressed early for what was to come.

During the fourth quarter of the game, it became clear that our team was going lose; but our impending loss didn't dampen our spirits any, because we knew that we had a celebration drawing nearer and nearer...and even before the game had ended, we started getting dressed for what was coming. The dance was sooner than when we'd first started to play; the game was far gone, the celebration was near—so it was time to lay aside basketball shorts and sweaty jerseys, and to don instead our shiniest shoes, our nicest suits, and our fanciest clip-on ties. Before the final buzzer even sounded, players were inching away from the bench—pushing aside gym bags and sweat rags, and taking up instead our formal attire.

I'm sure we looked really odd and out of place at the time: a point guard pinning on a corsage, a power forward wearing basketball shorts and French cuffs. We seemed out of place—and we were—because we were getting dressed for what was next. And even when it was clear that we would not win that game—with the celebration approaching, we were more moved by the joyful event to come than the defeat that was passing away.

And we just couldn't wait: we needed to get dressed, then and there, for what was next. We couldn't wait for the dance to start before getting changed; we didn't want to arrive at the dance wearing our jerseys. What had seemed okay before just wouldn't fit at the formal: gym socks had had their moment, but now it was time to put on clothing that befit the coming occasion.

You know, Advent offers a wonderful opportunity to recognize the time and to get dressed for what's coming; to recognize the Lord's nearness and to put on the garments of Christ. This season is our opportunity to look at our lives and our actions, our words and our habits, and ask: which of these belong in the world that shall yet be, and which of these need to be discarded? What parts of

our lives will befit the coming celebration with Christ, and what should be left behind like an old pair of gym socks?

Knowing what time it is, knowing that Christ is drawing nearer in love, we can start to inhabit the world God has promised. How then will we put on Christ, and the love of Christ—right now, this Advent? How will we get dressed for the celebration drawing nearer through Christ? “[S]alvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is near.” It’s time—so go ahead, get dressed up, and put on Christ! Amen.